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A REPLY

TO THE

BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH'S SPEECH

IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

ON

INTEMPERANCE.

BY THE

REV. R. M. GRIER, M.A.,

VICAR OF RUGELEY.

WITH A LETTER FROM THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP MAGEE.

“Our antagonist is our helper. This amicable conflict with difficulty obliges us to an intimate acquaintance with our object, and compels us to consider it in all its relations.”—BURKE.

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A LETTER.

MY DEAR LORD BISHOP,

It is with great reluctance that I sit down to criticise your recent Speech on Intemperance in the House of Lords. My regard for your character and office, my admiration for your talents, my sense of the eminent services which you have rendered to the Church, and my appreciation of the justice with which, under difficult circumstances, you have treated an unpopular religious school, no less than the fact that I claim you as a fellow-countryman and kinsman, constrain me to keep silence. But as a reply to your attack upon the Permissive Bill must be made and published, it is, I think, far better that it should come from the pen of a clergyman and friend, than of an entire stranger. The latter would not know, as I do, how incessantly engaged you are in the work of your diocese, and would therefore not be inclined to make allowance for mistakes, into which you have been hurried. He might, too, be unable to understand what I know full well, how incapable you are of intending to give offence by such expressions as “a vote of the streets,” or “a majority of the streets.” I should myself indeed prefer to speak of a vote of the people for the suppression of the liquor trade as “a vote of the fire-side,” the vote of men, who, knowing what the happiness of a quiet home is, desire to extend it to others: but I am sure that your Lordship meant no harm, when you employed another phrase to describe their vote.

Besides, it seems incumbent upon me to answer your Lordship. The Memorial, which was the occasion for your speech, was the result of the labours of a committee, of which I was Secretary. It appeared to some of the clergy, that the National Church had not done her duty in endeavouring to repress our national vice, and that through her Bishops, she had a splendid opportunity of making up for past remissness by calling attention

to the evil in a House, where *noblesse oblige* and not beer, and securing legislation upon it. I knew too—we had recently seen—how powerful is the voice of an united Episcopate. Against the expressed opinion of the Lower House of Convocation, and in spite of the remonstrances of the clergy, and many of the best and most devoted laity of the Church, they had succeeded in getting the Public Worship Regulation Act carried in both Houses of Parliament by a triumphant majority. How could I doubt that they would be as eager to use their whole political influence to restrain the drunkenness of the nation, as to correct the contumacy of clergymen who will not believe that the same colour is black or white, as is most convenient, on the authority of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council? I may have been mistaken, but at any rate I am bound to see that a bill, which I consider a mere act of justice does not suffer through any action of mine. This would be in itself a sufficient apology for my letter: but I greatly fear that it is due to my indiscretion in advocating the Permissive Bill on the occasion of presenting the Memorial to the Bishops, that your Lordship has attacked it with so much severity: and I am sure that you will agree with me, that if this be so, if I am thus to blame for having stirred up so powerful an antagonist to the measure, I am bound in honour to defend it.

I observe however that whilst it is only the Permissive Bill, that your Lordship directly attacks, you are extremely doubtful as to the success of any legislative action to abate the evil of intemperance. Indeed you seem to deprecate the appeal now made to the Legislature as “clamour for legislation.” But the presence of the Bishops in the House of Lords is of itself, I think, an indication that the morality of the people may be seriously affected by the Legislature. Otherwise it would be difficult to answer the question now too often asked, “why they should be there.” At the present time it is my firm conviction (and perhaps there are few clergymen who have greater opportunities for forming an opinion on the subject,) that for no political purpose could a larger number of clerical votes be polled than for the removal of the Bishops from the House of Lords. This is not my view. They ought, I am convinced, to be in Parliament, because the noblest object of Legislation is, in the

words of Mr. Gladstone, "to make it easy for men to do good and hard for them to do evil." Nor do I forget the services which your Lordship and other Bishops rendered a few years ago to the cause of morality in opposing the most mischievous clauses in the unfortunate Licensing Bill of the present Home Secretary. I am then still very sanguine that the Bishops having done so much to prevent mischief, will be as eager to undo it in their capacity of legislators.

This however your Lordship thinks, cannot and ought not to be done by the Bill known as the Permissive Prohibitory Liquor Bill of Sir Wilfrid Lawson. That measure you denounce in language which would, I suspect, be called intemperate in a teetotaler, as "absolutely immoral, thoroughly unconstitutional, and thoroughly mischievous in its operation." Still, your Lordship, I observe with great satisfaction, would not be averse from the entire suppression of a mischievous trade by an imperial act, if public opinion would allow it: this you call a logical measure: nor if the sale of alcohol can be proved to be injurious, would it, you acknowledge, be any interference with liberty to prohibit it all the country over. Such an admission coming from you, my Lord, is a very valuable one: and shows that you have a far greater sympathy with the policy of the United Kingdom Alliance than is generally supposed. Indeed, since your speech I have heard you boldly claimed as an unenrolled member of that Society. But honestly I am at loss to understand how a measure for the abolition of a trade throughout a country can be logical, and another for the abolition of it in a given district illogical: or how there can be a greater interference with liberty, when the ratepayers of a parish by a majority of two thirds suppress a trade for themselves for the space of three years, than when it is suppressed for them for ever by a bare majority of votes in Parliament. Ordinarily, I believe it is considered that local self-government is a safeguard against a centralised tyranny; but the nature of alcohol is so peculiar that, I suppose, ordinary rules do not apply, when it is under consideration. "Let not one single drop of alcohol be sold on English ground," that is logical, and is in no sense subversive of freedom. "Let not one single drop of it be sold in this parish," that is illogical and an offence against freedom.

But of course, if the Bill be "absolutely immoral" it can matter little, whether it promote liberty or restrain it. Christians cannot wish to do evil that good may come. It is necessary therefore to examine the argument with which you support the statement. It is given in the *Times* as follows: "It was absolutely immoral to say of a trade that it was poisonous, murderous and destructive to society, and then to say that if two thirds of the inhabitants wished to have this murderous, poisonous, and wicked thing in the midst of them, they should have it whether for good or bad. What would have been thought if Parliament had passed a law declaring, that if two thirds of the people in any village in India wished for infanticide they should be allowed to have it?" But your Lordship would seem not to be aware, that most of the advocates of the Permissive Bill would hesitate to describe the liquor traffic, as murderous, poisonous and wicked. They are content to say that it is dangerous to the health, happiness, life, prosperity, virtue and religion of the people, and believe, that if they can prove it to be so, they have made out a very strong case against allowing it to be forced into the midst of an unwilling community.

Of course there may be many communities so addicted to drinking in the country, that it would be useless to deny them facilities for drinking. This is the reason why the members of the Alliance, like your Lordship, do not press for the entire suppression of the trade; public sentiment is not in favour of it: very well then, we ask that public sentiment may be tested, and that in those places only in which it is found to be against the trade, the trade may be abolished. Why should this policy be regarded as immoral? "The trade is either good or bad," you reply: "if good, it should be everywhere allowed; if bad, it should be everywhere suppressed." Well I cannot quite make out whether you believe it to be good or bad; for evidently you would neither allow it everywhere, nor suppress it everywhere. You would neither allow all persons to sell it, nor prevent all persons from selling it; because public opinion is against you. Consequently you are guilty, on your own showing, of promoting an immoral policy. If the trade is good, you are supporting an injustice: if bad, you are protecting wickedness.

Forgive me, my Lord; this is not, I know, a fair repre-

sentation of your policy however bad the trade may be. The truth is, that the trade exists, and even if it be as immoral as you say some of its opponents describe it, there is no immorality in not immediately suppressing it. Of course in a conquered country, where gunpowder has more influence than public opinion, it may be possible at once to put down such a crime as infanticide, by the strong arm of the law. But even in India, we found it, I think, a little difficult to suppress Suttee, and we have not yet prohibited—no Bishop has ventured to propose in the House of Lords that we should prohibit—Polygamy. Is this immoral? I presume the answer would be, Polygamy undoubtedly is wrong; but it is an old evil in India; there people regard it in a wholly different light from the English; we must wait therefore till they are better instructed; but when they are prepared for the abolition of it, it shall be abolished. And for such a policy we have, it appears to me, the very highest authority. Slavery and Polygamy were both tolerated by God under the old Dispensation. He winked at them for the hardness of men's hearts. Was this immoral? I am sure that your Lordship would indignantly repudiate such a charge; you would vindicate in your own luminous style the justice of God's ways to man, and show that these institutions, the source of so many wrongs and cruelties, could not be abolished until the proper time had come, until, in other words, men were prepared for their abolition. But if, my Lord, you still think that there is any excuse for terming a law, which would permit evil to continue amongst a people, who desire it, immoral, what term will you apply to one, which forces evil upon a community which desires to get rid of it?

2. But of course whatever our objections to the liquor-trade, we none of us desire that it should be suppressed by a method which is thoroughly unconstitutional. But why should the Permissive Bill be so described? If it is proposed to establish a free library in any town, a vote of the ratepayers is first taken upon the subject. They will have to pay for the institution, and will be benefited by it; will they have it, or will they not? Is this unconstitutional and does it subject us to government by a vote of the streets? Again if it is proposed to establish a schoolboard, the same plan may be adopted; the people will

have to pay for it ; the people will be benefited by it : let them vote whether there shall be one. Why then should it be unconstitutional that the people, who have to pay for the sale of alcohol in more ways than in money, and who are, or rather who are thought to be benefited by it, should be allowed to say whether or no it shall be carried on amongst them ?

Your reply is that you fear that Archbishop Manning would be more likely in some parts of England, if government by a plebiscite and a vote of the streets were allowed, to be suppressed than the liquor-trade. It may be so ; and if it could be proved that the people had the same direct interest in suppressing him, or myself, or any other religious teacher that they have in suppressing the liquor-trade, I should not consider it unfair to entrust them with the power. When once it has been conclusively shown that men through the influence of their religious teachers are guilty of murder here, and theft there, and starve their children, and maltreat their wives, and increase the burden of local taxation, and are converted into sots and suicides, and brutes and fiends, then I shall regard a Permissive Prohibitory Religious Instruction Bill, as an eminently just and a thoroughly constitutional measure.

3. The third count of your indictment against the Permissive Bill is that it would be mischievous in its operation. First, because it would cause secret intemperance. Possibly, but would it cause more intemperance than it would repress ?

None of the supporters of the Permissive Bill are sanguine enough to suppose that it would if carried at once be put in operation in every part of England, and at once suppress intemperance even in those parts where it was put in operation. It is only recently that an effort has been made to enforce the Maine Liquor Law throughout the whole State, and it is allowed on all hands that drunkenness still exists in Portland and other large towns. But it has, I think, been abundantly proved that the State is vastly more sober than it was ; that, in fact, nine-tenths of the drunkenness of the State has disappeared. Supposing a similar result could be attained here in 1000 English parishes, should we not have reason to rejoice ? or ought our satisfaction at the diminution of intemperance to be checked by the reflection that such intemperance as still existed was secret ? True there

might be evasion of the law, but is the law never evaded now? Every newspaper in every part of England bears witness that it is; in some places indeed there would be far less chance of evasion of the law relating to the sale of liquor than now. At the present time the people are required to obey the law, whether they approve it or no. In many districts, in which the landlords think it right to close all the public houses, the people have no choice in the matter; and may consequently be disposed to encourage the illicit sale of strong drink. Of one such parish I have heard: there is, I am informed, a great deal of secret drinking there and a great deal of crime; in a parish, in which two-thirds of the people have declared themselves in favour of prohibiting the liquor-trade, the prohibition is, obviously, much more likely to be effective.

But secondly, you think that there would be strife and agitation caused by the Bill. No doubt the publicans would defend the sale of strong drink to the last, and use their whole influence to retain it. But can any other plan at all likely to remove temptation from the way of the people, who wish not to be tempted, without causing equal agitation, be proposed? and would not the disturbance be far less after all than that from which we suffer now, owing to the undisputed power of the liquor-traffic, and might it not be greatly restrained if only public houses were closed, whenever the votes of the people were taken? For my own part I cannot conceive how a battle with so gigantic a monster as English intemperance, can be fought with "rose-water," and I prefer the Permissive Bill to all other plans which have hitherto been proposed for attacking it, not because it is perfect, but because it seems to me the best under the existing circumstances of this country.

And now, my Lord, I must ask your forgiveness if I have mistaken a brilliant *jeu d'esprit*, for a carefully constructed argument; but I am quite sure that the great majority of those who have read it, believe that it was seriously meant, and I am bound to prove to them that, however it was meant, it will not bear examination.

But very gladly do I pass to a part of your speech which is marked by the wisdom and courage for which your Lordship is distinguished.

There is not I am sure a Parish Priest in England who will not heartily thank you for your boldness in condemning the homes in which so many of our poorer parishioners are obliged to live. It is shameful that in a Christian country horses should be better housed than men, and it may be one of the many causes of intemperance in England that the homes of our working men are so little attractive. But it is, on the other hand, a melancholy fact that a very large proportion of those classes who have comfortable homes and have been highly educated are intemperate. Indeed I do not hesitate to say that if the poor of England were no more sober than their betters, their drunkenness would be appalling. Why then should you expect drunkenness to vanish amongst them as education spreads and their homes become more attractive, when it has not vanished amongst people with a far higher education and much more attractive homes than we can hope that theirs will ever be? The Scotch poor are more highly educated than the poor of England, and more drunken; the Lancashire poor are better housed than the poor in other parts of England, and certainly not more sober.

There is one advantage, my Lord, which many of the Presbyters of the English Church owe to the mediocrity of their talents. They know the poor far better than they could have done if they had spent their time in study, or in consequence of their great abilities, had been separated from them by a wide social gulf. On questions, therefore, which concern the habits of the people, I venture with some confidence to oppose my judgment, as a Parish Priest of eighteen years' standing, to that of men who in many respects are greatly my superiors, and I assert unhesitatingly that no efforts for the social or religious improvement of the people will succeed on a large scale, so long as temptations to intemperance abound amongst them. The clergy have tried every means to counteract the influence of the public house and have met with but small success. The people are drinking and drunken still. We have started clubs and recreation rooms and mechanics' institutes, and organized missions, and visited from house to house, and spent time and money upon our schools, and set an example of total abstinence, and pleaded in the name of CHRIST. It is simply ungenerous

insolence on the part of the "Times" to suggest that we can do nothing but prepare jeremiads and sign memorials. We have done all that even that infallible journal can suggest, and we have failed to win the people to sobriety, and we shall fail so long as they are tempted, as they now are, to drunkenness. It may appear to you that I am wanting in faith when I say this. But the truth is, that men are hardly likely to be successful as Christians in winning others from a vice to which they tempt them as citizens; for, be it remembered, *we* are amongst those who tempt them without their leave, and very often against their will. The public houses in this country are the creatures of the law, and the law is the result of our votes. They might be removed if we pleased, and if we do not please, I cannot see how we can expect God's blessing to rest upon our labours. Nor does the fact that, as your Lordship asserts, there are many predisposing causes for intemperance, prove in the least that the sale of alcohol should not be restrained or prohibited; on the contrary, the more the inducements to the vice, the stronger the reason that the sale should be forbidden. The more inflammable a cask of gunpowder is known to be, the greater surely our precautions to guard it from the fire. But I am quite of your opinion that the clergy ought not to relax their exertions in their parishes and look to Acts of Parliament to do their work. No, we only ask of Parliament not to obstruct or undo our work. We will labour cheerfully "to purify and make beautiful the weary, laborious lives of the poor of England," but we demand that the law of this Christian country shall not "so make provision for the flesh" as to befoul and render them miserable. One clergyman there was, my Lord, though not of our communion, who laboured as you desire, who lived for the poor and like them, and who obtained over the masses of his countrymen a greater power than any religious teacher in the present century. For a happy but too brief period Ireland seemed almost freed from intemperance, but the liquor-trade was permitted to continue. Christian citizens allowed temptations to a gross vice to remain amongst a people who showed that they desired to escape from it, and Ireland is very nearly, if not quite, as drunken as she was before the days of Father Matthew.

But not nearly so much for the sake of the drunkard as for that of others do I ask that temptations to drinking may be removed, or at least that there may be power to remove them. Again and again am I witness of the misery which drunkenness inflicts upon those who are as innocent of it as myself. At present the work of a Parish Priest almost consists in vainly trying to counteract the evil results of one preventible vice. Here is a destitute widow whose husband it has killed; there a number of "wastrel" children whose mother it has brutalized; here a young deserted wife, who bears on her body undeniable proofs that she has a husband; there a middle-aged and dying wife whose heart it has broken. Even as I write, my Lord, a dear relative of my own is suffering intense pain, and is in some danger of sustaining life-long injury from a fearful blow inflicted by an educated man in a state of intoxication; naturally I ask, why should all this misery be allowed? Why should a trade, without which this vice hardly could exist, be tolerated? or if it cannot be abolished, why should the parishes in which the people are prepared for its suppression, be obliged to tolerate it?

The case, as it seems to me, stands thus between the friends and the opponents of the United Kingdom Alliance. In some 2000 English parishes there is no sale of alcohol allowed, and by the testimony of credible witnesses, very little drunkenness and little crime; wherever it is sold, there is a great deal of drunkenness and crime. "Why then," ask the former, "should not the sale of it be forbidden in all other parishes?" "Because," they are informed, "the people wish that it should be allowed." "Well then," they reply, "let the people in every parish say whether they desire it or no, and where they do not, let them at least be placed in the same favourable circumstances as the inhabitants of the 2000 parishes where alcohol is not sold." "No," it is retorted, "Englishmen must not be governed by a majority of the streets. Refrain from the drink, no one compels you to touch it." "We have done so," is the answer, "many of us for years; but why should the wives, and children, and parents of men who will get drunk suffer so much misery, when it is possible to prevent it? The clergy who know and love the poor tell you that there

are many who, so long as you tempt them to inebriety, will not resist temptation." "The clergy," is the answer, "want class legislation. They should work amongst their people and persuade them to be sober." "But the people themselves—the working men—ask to be protected from the temptation." "Oh, the working classes are always clamouring for legislation."

My Lord, at times my heart is hot within me, and I ask, when and how is this tyranny to end? Shall the people always be denied the right to protect themselves against a proved source of misery and crime? Shall injustice never be redressed except by violence? Is it absolutely necessary in this age of boasted enlightenment, to awaken a revolutionary spirit to abolish a gigantic evil? Shall the pleading even of the ministers of CHRIST in behalf of the poor and the oppressed be disregarded? Must they hold their peace and give place to demagogues, and allow them to go from town to town and tell the people that they are miserable and wretched from causes which are not removed, because the moneyed men, whom we delight to send to Parliament, prefer property to morality and vested interests to the suppression of an inveterate wrong?

My Lord, I forbear. My heart is too full to write more, and for what I have written I fear that you may be disposed to reprove me. But I am sure that you will acquit me of all intentional disrespect, and believe that I have written solely with the view of promoting a cause which I regard as "Deo, regi, vicino."

I am,

Your Lordship's faithful servant,

R. M. GRIER.

THE VICARAGE, RUGELEY,
July 7th, 1876.

MY DEAR GRIER,

I have to thank you for sending me a copy of the letter which you intend to publish in answer to my recent speech on the Permissive Bill.

You do not invite and I have no wish to make a reply. Were I to make one, it could only consist in saying over again

what I have already said, and in adding that your arguments have in no way altered my convictions.

When men differ essentially as to first principles, discussion between them is useless, and they must content themselves, as you and I must do, with stating their views once for all and leaving them to be condemned or accepted by those who read them. I wish, however, to take this opportunity of correcting the misapprehension on your part—that my speech was in any way caused either by the contents of the memorial to which you refer, or by your own speech when bringing that memorial before the Bishops.

That this cannot be the case is apparent from the fact that my speech was mainly a repetition and expansion of what I had said on the same subject three years ago.

I am not opposed, as you very fairly admit, to all legislation for the *regulation* of the liquor traffic, nor even, *on principle*, to one mode of its *suppression*.

I am, and I fear I shall always be, opposed, for the reasons I have stated, to one particular mode of its suppression, viz., the Permissive Prohibitory Bill.

I am well aware that in opposing this measure as I have done, I expose myself to much obloquy and unjust imputation of indifference to the cause of temperance, and to the moral and social well being of the working classes.

I might, were I disposed to be critical, complain of something of this mode of treatment in your own letter, and protest, I fear in vain, against the conviction which seems to animate all advocates of the Permissive Bill, that those who do not like their mode of dealing with intemperance can only be actuated by unworthy motives, such, for instance, as “fear of rich men,” or willingness to “tempt the poor man,” and the like.

I have no wish, however, either to complain of or to reply to such accusations. However unjust I may deem them, I can readily pardon them as expressing the deep earnestness of those whose hearts being “hot” as your own, in their grief for the evils of intemperance, are betrayed into using hot and unfair words against those who sharing their horror of those evils, differ conscientiously from them as to the proper remedies for these.

I prefer at any rate enduring this and much more from good and earnest men like yourself to purchasing their approval, and perhaps with it some cheap popularity, by suppressing my own convictions and by speaking and acting in opposition to my matured and deliberate judgment in this or in any other matter.

Were I ever to do this, I should certainly have shown that both Church and State would be the better for the expulsion of, at least, one Bishop from an assembly in which I have no wish to retain my place a single hour after I cease to be free to speak and act there solely according to the dictates of my own reason and conscience, and entirely unswayed by the dread of popular clamour, or the need for courting popular applause.

May I ask you to publish this letter along with your own; and may I further entreat you, "of your charity," to believe that however we may differ as to the proper remedies for the great national evils of Intemperance, I am as truly desirous of removing these as I am,

Sincerely yours,

W. C. PETERBOROUGH.

THE PALACE, PETERBOROUGH,

July 8th, 1876.

In reply I can only express my regret that my letter should have left on the Bishop's mind the impression that I attribute to him, as motives for his opposition to the Permissive Bill, fear of the rich or willingness to tempt the poor; I had no such intention, and am, I trust, incapable of being so unfair. Indeed the Bishop and I do not differ so much, as he imagines, as to first principles. I am a member of the United Kingdom Alliance for the entire suppression of the liquor-trade, and should, like the Bishop, greatly prefer the suppression of it by an Imperial Enactment, if it were possible, and the country were prepared for it. But, like the Bishop again, I do not think it possible; so, unlike him, I agitate and plead for, what, I think, can be obtained, for what, I am convinced, cannot long in common justice be denied, viz., that the people for whom the trade professes to exist, should be allowed to suppress it, if they

please. I am, however, very far from classing the Bishop, because he differs from me as to the best method of suppressing the traffic, with men who would resist every measure of restriction upon it, from a Maine Liquor Law, to the Sunday Closing Bill for Ireland. How to impute disinterested motives to these gentlemen with any regard for truth, it passes my charity and ingenuity to conceive.

R. M. G.

The following is the Memorial alluded to in the Letter :

We, the undersigned, Clergy of the Church of England, venture respectfully to appeal to your Lordships, as the only members of our order in Parliament, most earnestly to support measures for the further restriction of the trade in intoxicating liquors in this country. An intimate acquaintance with the people, extending, with some of us, over many years, has convinced us that their condition can never be greatly improved, whether intellectually, physically, or religiously, so long as intemperance extensively prevails amongst them ; and that intemperance will prevail, so long as temptations to it abound on every side. So far, however, the efforts to remove these temptations have been obstructed ; and recent debates in the House of Commons would seem to show that the importance of removing them is very inadequately appreciated by the Legislature. We appeal therefore to you, our Fathers in God, in the name of our Master, and for the sake of our country, for help and guidance in our endeavours to secure the serious attention of the Legislature to a fearful and widespread evil ; and we earnestly pray your Lordships to use the whole weight of your influence that another session may see the passing into law of some well-considered remedial measure. What the character of that measure should be, your Lordships will be able to determine : but we venture to remind your Lordships that a Committee of the Convocation of Canterbury has recommended in their Report on Intemperance, p. 15, that “a legal power of restraining the issue or renewal of licences should be placed in the hands of the persons most deeply interested and affected—namely, the inhabitants themselves—who are entitled to protection from the injurious consequences of the present system :” and that a similar recommendation is contained in the more recent Report of a Committee of the Convocation of York.

Amongst those, who signed it, were eleven Bishops (Suffragan, &c.,) sixteen Deans, sixty Archdeacons, and a large number of Canons and Honorary Canons. The names of those willing to sign it may still be sent to W. I. S. Horton, Esq., Talbot Villa, Rugeley.





